



Gerlach, J. (2017). Ecuador's experiment in living well: Sumak kawsay, Spinoza and the inadequacy of ideas. *Environment and Planning A*, 49(10), 2241-2260.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X17718548>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1177/0308518X17718548](https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X17718548)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via SAGE at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0308518X17718548>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

Ecuador's experiment in living well: sumak kawsay, Spinoza and the inadequacy of ideas.

Joe Gerlach

University of Bristol & University of Oxford

Accepted for publication by Environment and Planning A

Please do not cite or circulate without permission

joe.gerlach@bristol.ac.uk

Abstract

In April 2017 Ecuador halted the continental drift to the conservative right in Latin America by electing leftist Lenín Moreno to the Presidency. Attention has turned, therefore, to the legacy of outgoing President Rafael Correa's decade in power. To that end, this paper examines one of Correa's signature programmes, 'Buen Vivir' (Living Well), a strategic plan for development underscored by the indigenous Kichwa cosmology of 'sumak kawsay'. Sumak kawsay is a notion that has been co-opted into policy mechanisms in an attempt to both challenge neoliberal modes of governance, and to disrupt the ontological bifurcation of nature and society. Given the emphasis placed on ecological sensibility in sumak kawsay and Buen Vivir, critics have been quick to highlight the contradictory relations between Ecuador's mode of environmental governance and its extractivist agenda. Such critiques are as staid as they are well rehearsed. Acknowledging the precarious composition of sumak kawsay, the paper questions the extent to which the ethos of experimentalism in politics can be sustained, eliding stymied technocratic forms of the political. It turns, therefore, to Baruch Spinoza's treatise on adequate and inadequate ideas. In so doing, the paper examines how one can critique an idea without perpetuating a moral economy in judgment. Consequently, the paper considers the way in which Spinoza's thought can be charged to recuperate imperilled political ideas.

Key words: Sumak kawsay; Buen Vivir; Ecuador; Spinoza; inadequate idea

1. Introduction

On 02 April 2017, Ecuador halted a continental shift to the conservative right by electing Lenín Moreno to the Presidency of the Republic, thereby replacing Rafael Correa, head of state since January 2007. Elsewhere in Latin America, the elections of conservatives Pedro Pablo Kuczynski in Peru (2016), Mauricio Macri in Argentina (2015), the chaos in the wake of Dilma Rousseff's 2016 impeachment in Brazil and the rejection of a constitutional amendment to permit Evo Morales to stand in the 2019 Bolivian presidential race had all pointed assuredly to a shift in ideological momentum. Not so in Ecuador. Correa's anointed candidate, Moreno, Alianza PAISⁱ member and former Vice President between 2007-13, had

narrowly missed out on winning the presidency in the first round in February 2017, falling short by 0.64% of the 40% required of the popular vote. Right-wing, ex-banker and previous presidential candidate, Guillermo Lasso, achieved second-place, obtaining 28.09% of the popular vote. The second and final round was a closer affair, Lenín victorious by a popular share vote of 51.16% to Lasso's 48.84%. Given the narrow margin and contradictory forecasts offered by competing exit polls, Lasso refused to accept result. Claiming electoral fraud, Lasso was able to force a partial recount, but one that only confirmed the original result. Nonetheless, political fallout and rancour persists. The electoral map shows a country divided, and one that inverts conventional political logic. To the coastal west, including the largest city of Guayaquil – Lasso's home turf - Lenín commands a majority. Conversely, Lasso won regional majorities in most of the Andean highlands, including the capital Quito and in the Amazonian provinces too.

There are of course limits to the political narratives one can craft from election results. However, the close outcome inevitably generates questions regarding the survival of Correa's more experimental political gambits – even though his successor is aligned ideologically. Of particular note in this paper is the viability of a decade-long, precarious political experiment designed to cultivate a state-wide ethos and policy programme of 'living well'. This experiment has worked, variably, under the Kichwa phrase 'sumak kawsay' and its Spanish corollary – and formal policy mechanism introduced in 2007 - 'Buen Vivir'. Translated tentatively into English as 'living well', or 'good living', sumak kawsay is a set of fractious, disparate, indigenous cosmologies that have been co-opted awkwardly into Ecuadorian political discourse via three iterations of the National Plan for Living Well (*Buen Vivir Plan Nacional*). In harnessing and transforming the notion of sumak kawsay, primarily through Buen Vivir, the Ecuadorian state is further disrupting forms of neoliberal governmentality propagated by the Washington Consensus. Beyond this recalcitrance, the state's appropriation of sumak kawsay has prompted the political recognition of nature and non-humans in its 2008 Montecristi constitution.ⁱⁱ Sumak kawsay is therefore, following decades of political tumult in Ecuador, an experimental attempt to broaden 'what counts' as political. In so doing, questions emerge concerning the role of the state in generating and mediating such experiments. Ecuador is not alone in this experimentation. Bolivia and New Zealand too, for example, are states where notions of plurinationality and recognition of the non-human are becoming mainstays of political discourse. Unsurprisingly these novel state experiments have garnered considerable academic attention, much of which is focussed upon

their political, bureaucratic and social viability. Yet, how one holds such experimental politics to account is unclear. Present critiques of Ecuador's *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* tend to limit the potential of such ideas because they rely upon ontologically misaligned presumptions concerning the nature of an idea. This misalignment cultivates a moral economy in judgment. How then, does one examine ideas without recapitulating this transcendental register of critique? I suggest, in response, that one can turn to the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza.

A “philosopher of many posthumous births” (Sharp 2011: 1), Baruch Spinoza's speculative metaphysics and impassive rationalism provoke wonder, diffidence and bewilderment (Hampshire 1951). On the one hand, analytic philosophers have neither taken Spinoza to heart, nor his thinking seriously (Walker 1985). On the other hand, through a Deleuzian invigoration of his work, Spinoza is the catalyst for both a recalibration of ethics that eschews conflation with morality, and a rematerializing of ‘affirmation’ in philosophy and politics (Deleuze 1988 and 1990). In Geography, Spinoza has figured prominently in a restaging of affect and a concomitant experimentation, in thinking and fieldwork, into the generative capacities of bodies as micropolitical spaces of encounter (see, for example, McCormack 2007; Dawney 2013). Similarly, Spinoza's understated philosophy has also propagated thought-experiments into de-centring political imaginaries, thereby offering conceptual grounds upon which to establish post-humanism as a field of scholarship, matter and experience (Ruddick 2008, 2010, 2012). It is on this promulgation of a post-humanist ethos that I wish to expand upon the Spinozist examination of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir*. It is not, and cannot be, a singular reading of a singular Spinoza. Such conceptual policing would negate the generosity of Spinoza's thinking. Exegesis, too, would also be misguided given the volume of Spinoza's work. Noting the many varied readings of this renegade philosopher (Balibar 1989), I acknowledge that ‘Spinoza’ is not so much the spectre of an individual, nor the writings of a historical figure as much as ‘it’ is an on-going, collective and sometimes contradictory project of philosophy and politics.

Specifically, the paper will centre on Spinoza's formulation of ‘inadequate ideas’. In so doing, I argue that an idea's vitality lies in its expressive, not representative content, thereby eliding specious political judgments in which ideas are held in an intellectual tribunal adjudicating on the basis of categorical ‘success’ and ‘failure’. In relation to Andean cosmopolitics, Marisol de la Cadena (2010) – following Isabelle Stengers – encourages a slowing down of thought. In the midst of the growing debate on *sumak kawsay*, I intend to do

just that – to slow down, and to take seriously Alonso González and Macías Vázquez’s (2015) challenge *to add*, ontologically, to understandings of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir*. In turning to Spinoza, one implicitly acknowledges the indivisibility of ontology and epistemology. Consequently, the question of what *is* *sumak kawsay* is simultaneously a question of how one can apprehend *sumak kawsay*. Taken alongside the ethical impetus of Spinoza’s thought, the content of debate over *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* alters. Rather than a protracted contestation over meaning, one can instead speculate what an experiment in living well can achieve, both conceptually, and in Ecuadorian politics.

The rationale for this paper, and in particular for appealing theoretically to Spinoza, is threefold. Firstly, the ontological vibrancy of Ecuador’s *sumak kawsay* is a matter that cuts across concerns in economic, political and cultural geography, yet the latter has contributed remarkably little to the dialogue. This despite obvious resonances, for example, between *sumak kawsay*’s cosmological repudiation of the bifurcation of nature and society, and cultural geography’s energetic theoretical exchanges in anti-foundational accounts of the non-human, more-than-human and posthuman (see, for example, Braun and Whatmore 2010; Lorimer 2012; Barua 2014; Davies 2013; Jackson forthcoming). The hesitancy surrounding cultural geography’s limited engagement with such matters echoes political geography’s comparable reticence in engaging on a regional or areal basis, lest it be accused of intellectual colonialism (Powell et al. 2017). Spinoza’s metaphysics, it will be argued, provide the conceptual space in which these concerns can be – in part - allayed.

This paper is an attempt, as such, to bring cultural geographies into conversation with matters often left to geographies of political ecology, but in a manner that attempts to add, rather than usurp extant accounts of *sumak kawsay*. In short, the contribution of cultural geography here might be seen as offering a critique of patronising forms of political judgment, as opposed to unpicking the threads of a policy framework. Secondly, as made clear from the outset, Ecuador is in political transition. Notwithstanding a certain ideological continuity, there is ambiguity as to whether Lenín Moreno regards *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* as competencies of the state, or if they should be devolved to the private and voluntary sectors. At the same time, Lenín looks set to continue Ecuador’s extractivist drive begun under Correa, particularly in metallic ore mining. Having constituted a negligible percentage of Gross Domestic Product in the 1980s, the proportion now contributed by mining stands closer to 6%, with Ecuador’s Ministry of Mining seeking \$1bn foreign direct investment in 2017. The tension between extractivism and *sumak kawsay* evidently strains the credibility of

a politics sensitised to the non-human. This paper is motivated, therefore, by an urgency to critique a state experiment that hangs in the balance. Thirdly, and immanent to the previous point, is a normative rationale. Specifically, given the precariousness of both the Ecuadorian electoral transition and likewise that of ideas such as *sumak kawsay*, how does one hold on to experimentation in politics? The question is a tacit recognition, in concert with Felix Guattari's (2005) lament for ecology, that technocratic politics is spent. Instead, society needs to 'chance its arm' in dealing with the unfolding of social-ecological-mental degradation. The contention is that *sumak kawsay* constitutes a creative experimentalism provoked by the 'post-political' consensus in environmental politics (Swyngedouw 2011), one that risks, however, being rendered an 'inadequate idea' if appropriated in the name of technocracy.

The paper is structured in two parts. The first part examines the notion of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* by reviewing extant literature and by interrogating the concepts' entanglement in Ecuadorian politics. In so doing, particular attention is paid to the politics of translation and the manner in which attempts to find linguistic equivalence have stymied broader conceptualisations of *sumak kawsay*. This section then turns to a 'critique of critiques', examining the limits of the way in which *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* have been interrogated in political economy and political ecology. Specifically, the paper calls into question the extent to which *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* have been drafted into the postulation that they comprise part of a broader shift in governing modality, that of 'post-neoliberalism'. This critique foregrounds the second part of the paper, namely a meditation on Spinoza's inadequate ideas. It will highlight the resonances of Spinoza's metaphysics with *sumak kawsay* on the one hand, and the recapitulation of a nature-society dualism on the other hand. In addressing the risks of invoking European philosophy in an Andean context, the paper argues that Spinoza's treatise on inadequate ideas nonetheless helps overcome the moral economy of political judgments. As such, rather than close down the debate on *sumak kawsay*, the turn to Spinoza helps unpick the infantilising discourse surrounding Ecuadorian politics. In keeping with Spinoza's interest in affects, the paper concludes by considering a particularly problematic affect: hope. To that end, in the tumult of Ecuadorian politics, the paper speculates on the nature of hope offered by the country's experiment in living well.

2. Sumak kawsay: interrogating the good life

"Good living cannot be improvised, it must be planned" (SENPLADES 2013: 13).

Semantic examination of the term ‘sumak kawsay’ spotlights the agonism inherent in translation. Instead of settling for facile linguistic equivalence, the various translations of the Kichwa phrase ‘sumak kawsay’ into Spanish (*buen vivir*), and in turn from Spanish into English (*living well/good life/good living*), point to the oscillation between the plurality and singularity of an idea’s composition. This matters because an idea’s etymology is often the starting point against which intellectual assessment begins. In this instance, the questions that arise are the extent to which sumak kawsay encourages a ‘good life’; or, ontologically, ‘of what’ does sumak kawsay consist? Such inquiries invite reductive responses, exemplified by Vanhulst and Beling’s (2014: 57) description of the, “ambiguous equalization between the concepts of Buen Vivir and development...”. Put differently, the struggle to find linguistic equivalence results in a conceit; a, “failure to understand that understandings are necessarily not the same...” (Viveiros de Castro 2004; 11). Allied to the difficulties of translating sumak kawsay and Buen Vivir is the Andean figuration of ‘Pachamama’. As de la Cadena (2010: 350) remarks, Pachamama, “composes a culture-nature entity that, more complex than it seems at first sight, may belong to more than one and less than two worlds”. These natures and cultures do not automatically assume correspondence to any other societal assemblage, yet they have been all-too-easily absorbed as stable beings within the Ecuadorian political system. Consequently, acts of equivalence play into the troublesome natures of both inadequate ideas, especially given the radicalized and gendered manner in which Pachamama has been rendered. Translation also matters insofar as it draws attention to the asymmetrical political economy of academic publishing. Despite the growing prominence of sumak kawsay scholarship in Anglophone geographies, and likewise despite calls to ‘decolonise’ both the geographic discipline (Sundberg 2014) and the empirical study of Latin America (see, for example, Mignolo 2009; Escobar 2010; de la Cadena 2010; Walsh 2010), little by way of research in either Kichwa or Spanish has attained the academic recognition of its English-speaking counterparts (by way of a minor recuperative gesture, see, Hidalgo-Capitán et al. 2014; Huanacuni Mamani 2010; CONAIE 2007; Hidalgo et al 2012; Lara Lara and Herrán Gascón 2016; Oviedo Freire 2013). However, notwithstanding the occlusion of Kichwa and Spanish scholarship on sumak kawsay, the slippages between various translations offer a space in which to contest singular appropriation of the concept and to apprehend, “a category in the philosophy of life and ancestral indigenous societies [that] invites us to assume other ‘knowings’ and other ‘practices’” (Acosta 2010: 10).

Holding on to the linguistic ambiguity of *sumak kawsay* is especially important given the solidity with which it has entered Ecuadorian state lexicon, namely in preamble of the 2008 Constitution (Asamblea Nacional 2008: np, emphasis added):

“CELEBRATING nature, the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) of which we are a part and which is vital to our existence,

INVOKING the name of God and recognising our diverse forms of religion and spirituality,

CALLING UPON the wisdom of all the cultures that enrich us as a society,

AS HEIRS to social liberation struggles against all forms of domination and colonialism

AND with a profound commitment to the present and to the future,

Hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, *to achieve the good way of living, the sumak kawsay*”.

In both Spanish and English versions of the constitution, the use of the definite article before *sumak kawsay* indicates a statist desire that the concept be mobilised in an equally certain manner, one that strays from its ethos in Kichwa – a language without definite articles. In Kichwa, *sumak kawsay* is cognate to the Aymara term ‘*suma qamaña*’, one deployed by the plurinational state of Bolivia in a similar fashion to Ecuador’s use of the former. Linguistic caveats in place, ‘*sumak*’ can be understood as ‘plenitude’, and ‘*kawsay*’, less precisely, as ‘life’, ‘place’, or the ‘place where life happens’. In short, *sumak kawsay* comprises a distinctly geographical cosmology, obstinate toward translation and representation. Altmann (2014) diagrams the range of theoretical angles from which *sumak kawsay* has been understood, *inter alia*, as: a form of ‘republican biosocialism’ (Ramírez 2010), a ‘biocentric turn’ in politics (Hernández 2009), a weaponised discourse to protect indigenous territorial integrity, a uniquely Ecuadorian type of democratic socialism, to heralding a novel paradigm in socio-economic development praxis. Regardless of the genre of its appropriation, *sumak kawsay* commands admiration and derision from both Ecuador’s political left and right - its ambiguity again lending itself to its seizure across ideological lines. Indeed, Zimmerer (2012: 600) demonstrates that whilst *sumak kawsay* forms the “conceptual centre piece of ascendant indigenous movements”, the concept also, “coexists

uneasily in the continued amalgam of so-called neoliberal multiculturalism and environmentality” (603).

Transposed, firstly, into Ecuadorian electoral politicking and, secondly, into state policy, *sumak kawsay* was developed into, or conflated with the more widely used notion of ‘Buen Vivir’. This Spanish rendering of an Andean cosmology was the political matter around which the electoral movement of Alianza PAIS coalesced, a movement opposed to *partidocracia* - party rule - (Errejón and Guijarro 2016) and whose chief protagonist, Rafael Correa, was propelled to the presidency in 2006. The extent to which the term ‘Buen Vivir’ is used in preference to ‘*sumak kawsay*’ depends on the audience at hand. Government ministers and state departments have, to date, shown a predilection for the former, in part because of the growing antipathy of indigenous movements toward the Correa administration, and in part because of the elitist network in which the two terms were forged into government policy. Buen Vivir itself was formalised in an iterative series of three programmatic National Plans for Buen Vivir (2007-10, 2009-13, 2013-17 respectively); part of the defining motif of the Correa era – that of the ‘Citizens Revolution’. Products of Ecuador’s National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES), the National Plans are the outcome of extensive wrangling between anthropologists, social scientists, politicians and economists, though tellingly, with minimal involvement of indigenous collectives beyond their inclusion in Ecuador’s Constituent Assembly plenaries on *sumak kawsay*. Buen Vivir, understood as a policy framework, was formed outside of Kichwa assemblages (cf. Simbaña 2011) and beyond wider indigenous cosmologies. Indeed Altmann (2016) goes as far to claim that SENPLADES’ National Plan for Buen Vivir is such a departure from *sumak kawsay*’s attentiveness to reciprocity and traditional knowledges that it belongs to a different conceptual vocabulary altogether.

Nonetheless, the intellectual substance of Buen Vivir provides the conceptual rationale for an interventionist state as central to the Citizens Revolution (Silva 2016; Ramírez Gallegos 2016), one predicated on principles of social and ecological justice, progressive transnationalism, and one that seeks to attenuate the effects of a generation of neoliberal governance. Indeed, the 2013-17 iteration of the National Plan for Buen Vivir draws on David Harvey (2013) to critique neoliberal governance. In short, the policy and ethos of Buen Vivir are rebuttals of the Washington Consensus and its deleterious consequences visited upon Latin America (Gamso 2016). In this regard, the Ecuadorian state is bullish; “[Buen Vivir] is not a new development paradigm, but a social, liberating

alternative, which proposes other priorities for social organisation, unlike the mere economic growth implicit in the traditional development paradigm” (SENPLADES 2013: 15).

Importantly, Buen Vivir affronts the modern conceit (Latour 1993) of parsing nature from society (Gudynas 2011; Merino 2016), insisting instead upon the singularity of human and nonhuman co-existence. However, as Gudynas (2011: 443) stresses, “Buen Vivir should not be understood as a return to a distant Andean past, pre-colonial times. It is not a static concept, but an idea that is continually being created”. Yet despite Gudynas’ important rejoinder not to stray into romanticist notions of a pre-modern, ideological *pachamamismo*, part of the controversy stirred by *sumak kawsay* is that its translation into policy necessarily relies upon the legibility of such ideas, as illustrated by Ecuador’s formal assignation of legal rights to ‘Nature’. To what extent, then, does making an idea politically legible, work against the open-ended, ‘ontogenetic’ – processual – ethos of a concept? This is a question to which I return in the latter half of this paper in relation to the philosophy of Spinoza.

Beyond questioning the philosophies underscoring Ecuador’s political experiment, critical accounts of *sumak kawsay* and Buen Vivir abound. Caria and Domínguez (2016), contra Gudynas, reprove the notion of Buen Vivir for perpetuating a threefold conceit. Firstly, for encouraging a false consciousness; secondly, for concocting utopian ideals, and thirdly, for creating a dominant ideology in which the notion of ‘citizenship’ and citizen participation are mere empty signifiers. Elsewhere, amongst indigenous communities such as the Huarani, Shuar, and Kichwas, participation in the political promulgation of Buen Vivir has fallen away (Ramírez Gallegos 2016). This is due in large part to Correa’s intransigence toward Ecuador’s indigenous population and indigenous political movements such as CONAIEⁱⁱⁱ (having originally relied upon their support for his early electoral success). As such, and not least because *sumak kawsay* is a plural concept among multiple indigenous contexts (Simbaña 2011; Radcliffe 2012; Zimmerer 2012; Ludlow et al 2016), the conceptual and ethical space between *sumak kawsay* as a Kichwa cosmology and Buen Vivir as government policy continues to widen. In turn this inevitably calls into question the decolonising quandary, after Spivak (1988), for whom, or to whom, do *sumak kawsay* and Buen Vivir speak? As Elwood et al. (2016) intimate, the answer is decidedly uncertain. Zimmerer (2015), concludes therefore, that Buen Vivir cannot be understood solely as the policy of either a technocratic state, or viewed through the prism of a contrived, ‘indigenous state’.

The fields of political economy and political-ecology have also been energetic in their appraisal of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir*. Critiques in this regard are twofold. Firstly, in terms of a straightforward *realpolitik*, scholars have laid bare the obvious tensions generated by Ecuador's twin appeal to economic development on the one hand, and to ecological protection on the other. Secondly, even if such bi-polar concerns could be reconciled both conceptually and practically, questions remain concerning the precarity of Ecuador's constitutional architecture, its attendant lack of permanent standing judiciary, and its ability to enforce both human and nonhuman rights legally (Lalander 2014). From the recent acceleration and expansion of Ecuador's extractive industries under Correa to problems of gender violence and penal reform (Tapia Tapia 2016), such concerns surrounding the 'efficacy' of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* appear well-founded. Indeed, *Buen Vivir* can appear hampered by its own discursive logic, claiming for example, in a clause redolent of an Orwellian 'double-think' that, "the government aims to employ extractivism to abandon extractivism" (SENPLADES 2013: 76). Opponents of Correa traduce such claims as rhetorical bluster, while for Alianza PAIS, the claim represents a progressive logic in which growth in extractive productivity diversifies Ecuador's economy along sustainable lines. The well-publicised collapse of the Yasuní-ITT initiative (see Le Quang 2015) – in which Ecuador unsuccessfully solicited international funding to keep hydrocarbons in the subsoil – lends credence to critics' concerns, coupled with the suspicion that *Buen Vivir* has been a vehicle for the centralising tendencies of Correa's administration (Boelens et al 2015; Shade 2015). Yet these tribunals – intellectual and political – in which these criticisms are levelled, are framed by a broader debate as to whether *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* are constitutive of post-neoliberal modes of governance, despite Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington's (2011) entreaty to not equate *sumak kawsay* with post-neoliberalism. Such framing is problematic because post-neoliberalism is itself ill-defined, and yet it permits contradictory analyses of *Buen Vivir* to flourish.

Nonetheless, the Ecuadorian state is confident in its assertion that, "our neoliberal past has been left behind" (SENPLADES 2013: 14) - inviting speculation into what adjective should be assigned to the country's future. For some, this term is 'post-neoliberal'; a re-affirmation of the nation state marked by "reasonable regulation, more social services, and greater redistribution...", yet also, "an excess control over territory and society" (Elwood et al. 2016: 9). The premise of post-neoliberalism is straightforward enough – the attenuation of full-throated 'market forces' by an enhanced, regulatory state. Taken at face value, *Buen*

Vivir would indeed seem to constitute a programme of post-neoliberal credential. Yet if the ontological composition of neoliberalism is widely recognised as uncertain and contested (see, *inter alia*, Peck 2004; Brenner et al. 2010), then how does one lend credence to the actuality of post-neoliberalism when the logic of both modes of existence is one of capital accumulation? Does this awkward distinction not echo Harvey's (1991) suspicion of postmodernity's ostensible paradigmatic break from modernity? Yates and Bakker (2014: 64), noting the importance of historical contingency, are unequivocal; "the post-neoliberal project does not – and cannot - entail a wholesale break from neoliberalism or produce its binary other...". That Yates and Bakker (2014) go on to critique post-neoliberalism as a 'utopian-ideological project' is to mirror Caria and Domínguez' (2016) aforementioned critique of Buen Vivir as a similarly idealistic venture.

It is curious, then, that Buen Vivir, a tentative, contested political experiment, is figured as an avatar for post-neoliberalism, itself a provisional and uncertain heuristic. In setting the conceptual benchmark for analysing Buen Vivir thus, it necessarily heightens public expectation toward the political experiment's viability as a novel mode of environmental governance. Acknowledging Ecuador's extractivist drive exemplified by the country's mining laws of 2013 and the creation of a new Ministry of Mines in 2015, the instigation of Buen Vivir does not appear to mitigate against what one might term a neoliberal structural arrangement (Andreucci and Radhuber 2015), albeit one in which the state is 'unevenly' interventionist. In this regard, Davidov (2013) illustrates the manner in which the Ecuadorian government discursively engineers a notion of post-neoliberalism to differentiate between, on the one hand, oil extraction which is characterised as the long-arm of international neoliberal interference and, on the other hand, metallic ore mining as a patrimonial and quintessentially Ecuadorian activity. Consequently, the specific materialities of oil and gold or copper act as idioms for doing politics (see also, Valdivia 2008; Perreault and Valdivia 2010). Given the discursive power wielded in mediating *sumak kawsay* and Buen Vivir, the role of the Ecuadorian state is controversial, particularly in remote areas in which the population are habitually suspicious of big government (Gonzalez-Vicente 2013) – or whereby indigenous populations are disadvantaged regardless of whether the system is identified as neoliberal or post-neoliberal (Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2011). In sum, if one regards Ecuador's political experiment as a paragon of post-neoliberalism, and assesses it under the aegis of historical-materialism (see Wilson and Bayón 2015 and 2017), then it is all too easy to cast doubt on the adequacy of Buen Vivir and *sumak kawsay*. It is

perhaps for this reason that the Ecuadorian state distances itself from the appellation ‘post-neoliberal’. To that end, geographers and social scientists have since insisted on a more circumspect reading of novel modes of governance in Latin America as ‘not-quite-neoliberal’ (see de Freitas et al. 2015; Zimmerer 2015; Anthias and Radcliffe 2015; Ruckert et al. 2016). It is a deliberately diffident term; one that acknowledges the need to be analytically circumspect when dealing with notions that imply definitive breaks in time and space.

Such diffidence in assigning ‘paradigmatic categories’ to novel ideas is important. To frame Buen Vivir and sumak kawsay in either neoliberal or post-neoliberal terms would be to subject them to an epistemological tribunal that elides the ontological ‘additive’ that the concepts can offer. To précis a complex account, Alonso González and Macías Vázquez (2015) contend that the debate concerning Buen Vivir and sumak kawsay is pre-occupied with the concepts’ representational framing and thus with their legible essence. In part they attribute this epistemological predilection to the lack of fieldwork and pragmatic experimentation undertaken in respect of sumak kawsay. They also note that ‘Buen Vivir’ in its official co-option, is quite different to ‘sumak kawsay’ in the manner in which it works in indigenous communities. This focus on epistemology, they conclude, “leads to the proliferation of critical discourses that oppose the regime’s moral discourse with other sorts of moral. There is, in short, a paucity of accounts that provide colour to the pragmatics and mundanities of living well in Ecuador. There is little space, it seems, for ontology, despite sumak kawsay’s explicit disavowal of nature-culture dualisms, to reject a Cartesian binary exported with colonial zeal by Christopher Columbus (Acosta, 2015). To both confront this dualism, and to offer a novel theorisation of sumak kawsay, the paper now turns to the Spinoza and his formulation of adequate, and inadequate, ideas.

3. An inadequate idea?

In the context of Ecuador’s sumak kawsay, Spinoza can be harnessed immanently in a twofold manner. One, in respect of Spinoza’s metaphysics, and two, in respect of Spinoza’s meditation on ‘ideas’, specifically concerning their ‘adequacy’ or ‘inadequacy’. The latter requires an examination of the nature of an idea itself, which in turn provides the basis for a political assessment of sumak kawsay that is not reliant on tropes or metrics from political-economy. Given contemporary debates on decolonising academia, and noting specifically, Gudynas’ (2011) admonishment of the use of western notions in an Andean context, I wish to address the ethics of invoking the work of a European philosopher in an *Américan* empirical

context. The risk of conceptual ‘superimposition’, of foisting incommensurable epistemological regimes upon one another, sometimes violently, is sufficiently self-evident to warrant concern, as per Sundbergs’s (2003) concern with the silences in Latin American fieldwork. To deny such a risk would be unduly defensive. However, what matters more, arguably, is not necessarily the provenance of any given philosopher or philosophy, but the manner in which concepts are brought to bear upon any given topic or geography. It is, therefore, a question of attuning the style and moment of ‘application’ of a theory (Gerlach and Jellis 2015), so that theories are not engineered as frameworks with which to scrutinize and colonise worlds. With specific regard to Spinoza, his own religious persecution in 17th century Netherlands and intellectual occlusion by Descartes make him and his philosophy something of a minor tradition in European epistemic circles, let alone in those of Andean Latin America. Spinoza’s corpus, such as it is, cannot be understood as constituting a hegemonic intellectual front. In this respect, Marx continues to be the greatest export, by volume at least.^{iv} The point here is not to privilege any one thinker, but to offer a minor reading of a philosopher whose life’s work was a speculative examination of what it is to live a life well, in the same manner that Ecuador attempts its own experiment in precisely the same matter. Likewise, Spinoza provides the conceptual nuance to apprehend *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* in a decolonial manner – not to pronounce upon their efficacy, but instead to affirm the vibrancy of precarious ideas. As Rehmann (2016: 412) remarks, in relation to *sumak kawsay*, “whenever we go beyond the usual laundry lists of progressive demands and develop a politics centre upon projects of a good life for all, Spinoza’s combination of *potentia*, hilarity and joy can provide invigorating philosophical support”. To that end, and in order to foreground the discussion on adequacy/inadequacy, I first explore, briefly, Spinoza’s sketch of the world in relation to Ecuador’s novel politics.

Spinoza’s metaphysics detail a monist cartography of the universe.^v Outlined primarily in *Ethics*, Spinoza diagrams the being, or becoming, of an indivisible substance in which everything exists, persists and strives (*conatus*). It is a metaphysics of a unitary world in which contrary claims supporting divisibility are denounced as a mutilation, or as a woeful misunderstanding of the nature of substance (Quinton 1987). Contra his fellow rationalist Descartes, whom Spinoza nevertheless held in high esteem, the attributes of thought and extension (mind and body) are, as per substance, indivisible from one another, hence Spinoza’s refusal to privilege mental cognition at the expense of somatic passions and affects. Exhibiting these attributes of thought and extension are modes, or bodies, of which there is,

Spinoza argues, an infinite array. In the complexity of Spinoza's ontology all bodies are co-constitutive and co-affective in the totality of substance (Sharp 2007). To this end, Spinoza's metaphysics resonates with Amerindian ontologies of 'multinaturalism' (Viveiros de Castro 2014) – a notion that has provided conceptual material for the cultivation of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* by the Ecuadorian state. Both *sumak kawsay* and multinaturalism point to the matter of a *universal* substance, but in ways that inhibit *universalizing* tropes on nature and the non-human. Concomitantly, Spinoza's diagram of the world does not permit specific valorisation of a particular mode or body. This is to recapitulate opposition towards Descartes' postulation of humans as ontologically pre-eminent modes, surmised in his assertion of *imperium in imperio* - a dominion within a dominion. Such anthropocentric ambitions are attenuated deliberately by Ecuador's constitutional elevation of 'nature' to the same plane of existence as humans through its attribution of legal and political rights to the former. Moreover, the structured legalese of the constitution also echoes the geometric method in which Spinoza expounds upon his own ontology in *Ethics*. Two caveats should be noted at this juncture. Firstly, Spinoza writes of a nature that is not solely reducible to its connotation as the space of the non-human; a common misapprehension. Indeed the former Ecuadorian minister of energy and mines, prominent interlocutor in the *sumak kawsay* debate and ardent critic of Rafael Correa, Alberto Acosta (2013), quotes Spinoza in this regard, selecting a renowned passage from *A Theologico-Political Treatise*; "...whatsoever is contrary to nature is also contrary to reason, and whatsoever is contrary to reason is absurd" (Spinoza 2002: 452). Acosta, here, is attempting to build the conceptual foundations upon which to propagate *sumak kawsay* as a political programme whereby nature as the space of the non-human is itself a political actor. Yet, Nature, for Spinoza, is synonymous with the entirety of substance, not just for an imagined domain of the non-human. Secondly, whilst the Ecuadorian constitution recognises the rights of nature, it does so on the basis of an ontological break between human society and a non-human nature. However, what might be regarded as Ecuador's inadvertent or deliberate constitutional rehearsal of modernity's dualistic conceit should not be rendered antithetical to Spinoza's metaphysics of substance. 'Nature', in the non-human sense, and 'humans', even if understood as distinct from one another, can still be part of an undulating and indivisible substance, the ethics of which does not allow for one mode's predominance over another. Ruddick (2016) reinforces this point in direct reference to Ecuador, noting that those who would plunder, and those who would protect the environment, are ironically held together in tension by a common disjuncture, namely that both sides reassert a fundamental break between nature and society, thus

generating “impossible worlds” (Ruddick 2016: 3) – worlds incapable of a shared existence. Does this, therefore, render *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* redundant? Are they inadequate ideas?

Examining an idea on the basis of its ‘adequacy’ or ‘inadequacy’ might appear ungainly. Yet as per his definition of nature, Spinoza is working outside of a register of everyday meanings. By way of a pre-emptive conclusion, the point here is to harness an idea’s expressive, rather than its representative, content.

Spinoza’s thesis on the nature of ideas is characteristically demanding. Likewise, his definitions of adequate and inadequate ideas, whilst concise, are ambiguous. That said, it is important to emphasise that the prefix ‘inadequate’ does not point to a conceptual deficiency in the quality of an idea. It is concerned, instead, with the derivation of an idea, and subsequently, with how one apprehends the cause of that idea. Counter-intuitively, Spinoza offers more by way of explanation for inadequate ideas than he does on adequate ideas, owing to his certitude concerning the provenance and nature of adequacy. Yet what, for Spinoza, is the nature of an idea? They are not, in this instance, fantastical images of the mind’s eye (Spinoza 2002). They are instead, as McAllister (2014: 124) suggest, “very much sort of an activity – that is [quoting Spinoza], ‘a mode of thinking, to wit, the very act of understanding’”. Ever the rationalist, Spinoza sub-divides this mode of thinking into the taxa ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate’. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of Intellect*, Spinoza (2002: 264) proposes,

“Inadequate and confused ideas follow by the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct, ideas... all ideas are in God, and insofar as they are related to God, they are true and adequate”.

Adequate ideas, then, are those that are understood to follow from God, uninterrupted by the thinking processes of finite beings (such as humans). McAllister (2014: 119) proposes that the two types of idea could be, “characterised by the manner in which they grasp their objects. Adequate ideas conceive of their objects as following from God. Inadequate ideas conceive of their objects as affecting the body at a time and place”. Boundas (qtd in Parr 2010: 267) adds that inadequate ideas are ones, “whose cause is not in our own power to understand”, and ones in which the mind acts passively (as opposed to actively in respect of adequate ideas). To my understanding, inadequacy is fomented in moments and spaces of *interruption*. That is to say, adequacy is interrupted by interferences either from experience,

or from imagination. Experience and imagination, as it were, obstruct the potential adequacy of ideas. Woodward (2014: 21/23), likewise, traces an inadequate idea as “a mode of embodied not-knowing... a misapprehension of a set of affects and their causes”. Given that bodies are subject to experience and misapprehension it is inevitable, for Spinoza, that humans are predisposed to knowing only of inadequate ideas. Deleuze (1988: 19) clarifies, “in short, the conditions under which we know things and are conscious of ourselves condemn us to have only inadequate ideas, ideas that are confused and mutilated, effects separated from their real causes”.

On this reading of Spinoza, assessing the (in)adequacy of Buen Vivir and *sumak kawsay* seems futile, insofar as their geneses in collective thought, experience, political bargaining and duration renders them inadequate. Similarly, whilst the syncretic Roman Catholic status of Ecuador (Gade 1999) does proffer God as a relevant ‘actor’ in terms of the background idea of *sumak kawsay*, its cause is not known adequately as deriving from God. What, then, is the purpose of assessing a contemporary political programme against Spinozist propositions? In response, one needs to move beyond an instrumental reading of Spinoza in which the role of affect is overlooked. Importantly, it is the affective lives of ideas which enable their flourishing or diminishment. In this regard Deleuze (1988: 76) suggests, “an idea, whether adequate or inadequate, is always followed by feelings-affects (*affectus*) that result from it as from their cause”. In the case of the adequate idea, the subsequent affect is one of action, as compared to the subsequent affect of an inadequate idea, which is one of passion. Spinoza finds a singular beauty in the active mind knowing its cause and action adequately. Yet as Montag (1989) elucidates, despite his rationalist love of God, Spinoza was not one to patronise or satirise passion as a mode of knowing, being and existing. It is on this matter of passion and affect upon which one could propagate and sustain the ethos of an idea such as *sumak kawsay* without holding it to transcendental judgments. That an idea is inadequate, in Spinozist terms, does not necessarily make it inadequate in everyday registers of judgment. Indeed, Spinoza (2002: 321) shows little tolerance for moralistic appellations; “as for the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’, they likewise indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form from comparing things with one another”. By extension, apportioning success or failure to an experimental way of living and governing, as through *sumak kawsay*, similarly tells us nothing about the composition and potential of such ideas in of themselves.

On this point, Gudynas (2013) commends *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* not so much for the macro-political challenge it presents to capitalism, but for the tentative nature of the idea itself, namely that it is always in composition. It is mutable, radically uncertain, precarious; in short, ontologically instable. Indeed, all ideas are prone to such instability, but in this case, *sumak kawsay* is both deliberately designed and allowed to flourish thus. *Sumak kawsay* invites its own inadequacy, that is, it welcomes interruptions and disruptions to how it is written, performed and understood. That might be read, pessimistically, as *sumak kawsay* lacking in political guarantees. Or instead it could be understood as one not lending itself to formal measurements which inhibit its potential, such as aforementioned equivalences made with neoliberalism, not-quite-neoliberalism or post-neoliberalism.

Hasana Sharp's (2011) 'renaturalising' of Spinoza highlights the need to cultivate ideas in a deliberate manner. As per the notion of nature in its guise *natura naturans* (naturing nature), ideas are not static receptacles of matter, but active forms of thinking that diminish or flourish depending on the ambient space-time in which they are created. Ideas, contends Sharp (2011: 71), "like bodies are augmented by amenable encounter with similar ideas and weakened by destructive, contrary encounters". This holds for adequate and inadequate ideas, insofar as both forms are consolidated by supportive environments composed of relational ideas pertinent to, and compatible with, their cause. This is to riff on Spinoza's formulation of the affects in which joyful affects augment bodily capacities in distinction to sad affects which conversely diminish bodily capacities to know and experience the world. Spinoza, as Sharp (2011: 57) concludes, "asks us to consider ideas in terms of their force, vitality and power rather than primarily in terms of their truth and falsity". Again, this is to argue that ideas should be apprehended on the basis of their expressive rather than representative content.

In respect of Ecuador's *sumak kawsay*, its ethos is one of environmental protection, the revalorisation of ecological vibrancy, social justice, and a striving toward augmented human attunement toward the non-human. Yet, put indelicately, its 'rhetorical promise' seems blunted by aforementioned extractivist activities and attendant degradation. Judged from a register in which rhetoric is held account to a limited range of material politics, then indeed the idea of *sumak kawsay* can be adjudicated to have failed. From that judgment, one can extend the sorry tale to claim that, against all promise, *sumak kawsay* is not a substantive departure from neoliberalism. However, such pessimism is countered by two Spinozist critiques. Firstly, in Spinoza's metaphysics, whilst Sharp (2011) suggests it lays the

foundations for a posthumanist ethics, the philosopher himself was no animal enthusiast or environmental conservationist. Spinoza (2002: 361), as ever, is blunt on the issue; “And so whatever there is in nature apart from men, the principle of seeking our own advantage does not demand we preserve it. Instead, it teaches us to preserve or destroy it according to its use, or to adapt it to our use in any way whatever”. Rafael Correa (qtd in Bebbington et al 2013: 252), in frustration toward mining protests in 2008 exclaimed, “it’s absurd to be sitting on top of hundreds of thousands of millions of dollars, and to say no to mining because of romanticisms, stories, obsessions, or who knows what”. On this matter, and not least for his castigation of romantic sentimentality, Correa has a political ally in the form of Spinoza. Secondly, and aside from Spinoza’s metaphysical take on the non-human, a conventional judgment against *sumak kawsay*’s effectiveness is to fall into the trap of transcendental moralising. This is to say that what matters in the context of *sumak kawsay* is not the question of whether the idea of *sumak kawsay* itself is inadequate, but that the framework for judgement of *sumak kawsay* is inadequate. Hynes (2015: 4) puts it thus, “a moral framework offers an inadequate understanding of our ‘cause’ and, as such, is precisely what keeps us from our power of action. Bemoaning one’s own or other’s indifference to the issues of the day, then, is not only potentially unproductive but also ontologically confused”. Sharp (2007: 733) reiterates the need to think, therefore, of ideas in terms of their vitality, imploring, “the effort to think and live well requires attention to the collective dimensions of thinking life, where ‘collective’ refers to a transpersonal accumulation of ideal power that included human as well as non-human beings”. However, it is not all to do with judgment. As Acosta’s (2013) appropriation of Spinoza illustrates, there are specific aspects of *sumak kawsay* that readily lend themselves to misapprehension, and therefore to inadequacy. In this instance, it is the misapprehension of a discrete nature held in relief to a discrete humanity. In Ecuador the inadequacy of the political rendering of nature is compounded in its constitutional assignation of rights to that singular nature. Ruddick (2016) is left to conclude, therefore, that Ecuador’s recognition of non-human rights – as posited in law – is an inadequate idea insofar as it restricts the ambit and definition of nature. This delineation of a singular nature is all the more egregious given the epistemic harm it enacts against indigenous animations of the non-human.

Consequently, what detracts from *sumak kawsay*’s flourishing as an expressive mode of ecological engagement is the superimposition of inadequate modes of judgment. Such modes are based on macro-political registers, propagated by epistemological disjuncture; in

this case between *sumak kawsay* on the one hand, and muddled notions of neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism on the other. As Gonzáles and Vázquez (2015: 10) assert, “...representational, and transcendental thought leads us to criticism, and to a colonial and dogmatic image of thought – a place from which it is difficult to think about and make room for otherness and its expression”. Likewise, that an idea such as *sumak kawsay* does not pass the threshold of effectiveness in liberal thought does not mean such an idea cannot be efficacious. Efficacy need not be a mere synonym for effectiveness. For Jane Bennett (2010: 31), “efficacy points to the creativity of agency, to a capacity to make something new appear or occur”. Capacity, therefore, as much as ‘results’, matter in understanding the force of an idea such as *sumak kawsay*, or an experimental policy such as *Buen Vivir*. This relates not just to the capacities of ideas, but also to the capacities of other bodies to allow for difference to be expressed. Considering capacity as a form of augmenting the ‘adequacy’ of *sumak kawsay* also enables a more productive reading of post-neoliberalism. As Grugel and Ruggirozzi (2012: 16) remark, “...whether post-neoliberalism is understood as genuine attempt at building a more democratic politics also comes down, to some extent, to what constitutes democracy...identity politics and voice within democratic systems...”. Spinoza’s treatise on the capacity of ideas, therefore, lends conceptual space to dwell not only on the inadequacy of *sumak kawsay*, but also on the inadequacy of democratic politics.

4. Conclusions

Political ideas such as Ecuador’s *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* are risky, both in nature and in their circulation. The casting of indigenous cosmologies into legible, liberal democratic norms is likewise a tentative act whose effects are contradictory. On the one hand it makes visible marginalised ontologies. Conversely, the moment of translation – linguistic and epistemological - can foreclose ontological potential, acting only to reiterate the troublesome dualisms that *sumak kawsay* attempts to undo.

Notwithstanding the many critiques and outright criticisms of Ecuador’s experiment in good living, *sumak kawsay* is a creative and experimental wager against a legacy of military rule and technocratic stalemate. This could be construed as an apologia for *Buen Vivir*, for *Correísmo*, or for Ecuador’s extractivist turn. I argue, however, in drawing on the Spinozist sensibilities of this paper, that this is not a moral pronouncement on the efficacy of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir*, but a critique of ‘inadequate judgments’ thereof. Such

judgments are based on normative metrics of success and failure, themselves fomented by notions of neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism. Instead, drawing on Spinoza's metaphysics, I argue that firstly, a political recognition of humans and non-humans forming one extensive substance does not assume the existence of a pristine nature that must be protected for its own sake. Secondly, I suggest that the virtue of ideas is not a given and that ideas do not exist in a state of grace. Ideas need to be pushed and experimented upon in order to proliferate. In the face of the social-ecological-mental violence of the present, ideas need amenable affective environments in order to flourish. Given the current macro-politics of Ecuador, this amenable environment – affective, material, virtual – is uncertain.

Lenín Moreno's election to the Presidency does not guarantee the future of *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir*. Lenín is not the firebrand revolutionary of his namesake, nor cast in the same populist mould of the departing Correa. To that end, *Buen Vivir* as a national plan for development is at risk of being abandoned. Such a move, however, pertains only to formal policy frameworks. What matters more is the adequacy or inadequacy with which the *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* is mobilised *idealistically*. As such, if Lenín does hold on to *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* as political ideas, two things need to happen. Firstly, political and public understanding of the cause and nature of *sumak kawsay* needs to be made 'adequate'. Noting Ruddick's (2016) critique that the instigation of the rights of nature in Ecuador paradoxically reifies the human – non-human dualism because of an inadequate understanding of nature, it follows that greater conceptual nuance is needed in articulating the non-human in Ecuadorian politics. Given their occlusion from previous consultations on the matter, this would likely require a constitutional convention in which indigenous communities are afforded a prominent role in complicating sensibilities of non-human natures. At the same time this is a tacit recognition that future amendments of the constitution would need to textually allow for plurality, or at least multiplicity, in any definition of nature or the non-human. In Article 71 of the Ecuadorian constitution, 'nature' is defined as, "... the place where life happens" (Asamblea Nacional 2008: np). This singularisation of both nature and place inevitably confines the ambit of what these terms can entail. Here an appeal to definitional 'addition' could be useful. However, there is a limit to what the representational content of an idea can attain, hence Spinoza's exhortation too hold also to the expressiveness of an idea. This leads to the second of the two actions required to sustain *sumak kawsay*, though less instrumental than the first. It is the need to cultivate the amenable atmosphere in which *sumak kawsay* can flourish. Historical opposition towards *sumak kawsay* and *Buen*

Vivir was aimed at Correa's style of Presidency, and the abrupt manner in which sub-projects pertaining to *sumak kawsay* such as the Yasuní-ITT initiative were abandoned. Correa's critics also chided his *caudillismo* – or authoritarian manner – in leadership. Whilst Lenín does not share this characteristic, the 'adequacy' of *sumak kawsay* is at risk if it remains evoked only through policy mechanisms. As Fiallos (2014: np) remarks pointedly, "life does not become beautiful by decree". This inverts the Soviet-esque tone of *Buen Vivir*'s insistence in its policy preamble that living well is to be planned, not improvised. On that basis, future Ecuadorian governments need to re-consider the stringency with which it considers the state to be the prime actor in fomenting a life of plenitude. Similarly, more imagination – however seemingly tenuous – is needed in how *sumak kawsay* is 'implemented', beyond policy initiatives. To this end, such a provocation is largely speculative.

What hope then, for *sumak kawsay* and *Buen Vivir* in Ecuador? The response requires direct recourse to hope itself. Hope has long been matter of curiosity to Spinoza, social theorists and geographers alike (see for example, Anderson 2006; Eagleton 2015; Gerlach 2016). Hope does not imply a naïve, unalloyed glee, or an abstract hopefulness, toward someone or something. Spinoza (2002: 288) is downbeat on hope, infamously categorising it as "inconstant pleasure, arising from the image of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in doubt". "Mingled with sorrow" (74), Spinoza holds hope in relational tension to fear; one cannot be evoked without the other. Even in hope, as on ideas, Spinoza refuses to enter into moral adjudication; "the emotions of hope and fear cannot be good in themselves" (345). In brief, one might conclude that there is hope for *sumak kawsay* insofar as it is speculative in its composition. This is opposed to a closing down of an idea based on transcendent registers that constrict space for doubt or speculation. Against Spinoza, I argue that one need not use the term 'hope' in this regard. 'Melancholy' instead could work, even if it does, according to Spinoza, diminish a body's affective capacity. However, melancholy retains a spectre of doubt that arguably offers a speculative and productive mode of critique, without lapsing into straightforward affirmation or cynicism. Melancholy is an affective disposition in which the utopian stretch of *sumak kawsay* can be extended without 'universalizing' indigeneity. The motive for turning to melancholy is unoriginal. That is to say, bluntly, given the ecological desperation of the late Holocene, societies need to intensify the experimental tenacity of ideas. *Sumak kawsay*, is arguably one such experimental venture, albeit one that is liable to inadequate comprehension and inadequate appropriation.

This does not automatically make it a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ idea. Such judgments are themselves inadequate. But it does make it something of a difficult idea, one that causes disruption to thought. Perhaps though, as Spinoza (2002: 382) opines, “all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare”.

References

- ACOSTA A (2010). El Buen Vivir en el camino del post-desarrollo. Una lectura desde la Constitución de Montecristi. *Policy Paper*. Quito: FES-ILDIS.
- ACOSTA A (2013) Otra economía para otra civilización. *Temas* 75: 21-27.
- ACOSTA A (2015) El Buen Vivir como alternativa al desarrollo: algunas reflexiones económicas y no tan económicas. *Política y Sociedad* 52: 299-330.
- ALONSO GONZÁLEZ P, MACÍAS VÁZQUEZ, A (2015) An ontological turn in the debate on Buen Vivir - Sumak Kawsay in Ecuador: Ideology, Knowledge and the Common. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 10: 315-334.
- ALTMANN P (2014) Good life as a social movement proposal for natural resource use: the indigenous movement in Ecuador. *Consilience: The Journal of Sustainable Development* 12: 82-94.
- ALTMANN P (2016) Buen Vivir como propuesta política integral: dimensiones del Sumak Kawsay. *Mundos Plurales: Revista Latinoamericana de Políticas y Acción Pública* 3: 55-74.
- ANDERSON B (2006) "Transcending without transcendence": utopianism and an ethos of hope. *Antipode* 38: 691-710.
- ANDREUCCI D, RADHUBER, I (2015) Limits to 'counter-neoliberal' reform: mining expansion and the marginalisation of post-extractivist forces in Evo Morales' Bolivia. *Geoforum* In Press.
- ANTHIAS P, RADCLIFFE, S (2015) The ethno-environmental fix and its limits: indigenous land titling and the production of non-quite-neoliberal natures in Bolivia. *Geoforum* 64: 257-269.
- BALIBAR E (1989) Spinoza, the Anti-Orwell: the Fear of the Masses. *Rethinking Marxism* 2: 104-139.
- BARUA M (2014) Bio-geo-graphy: landscape, dwelling, and the political ecology of human-elephant relations. *Environment and Planning D* 32: 915-934.
- BEBBINGTON A, HUMPHREYS-BEBBINGTON, D (2011) An Andean Avatar: Post-Neoliberal and Neoliberal Strategies for Securing the Unobtainable. *New Political Economy* 16: 135-145.
- BEBBINGTON A, HUMPHREYS-BEBBINGTON, D., HINOJOSA, L., BURNEO, L., BURY, J (2013). Anatomies of conflict: social mobilization and new political ecologies of the Andes. In: BEBBINGTON A, BURY, J (ed.) *Subterranean Struggles: New Dynamics of Mining, Oil, and Gas in Latin America*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- BENNETT J (2010) *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- BOELEN R, HOOGESTEGE, J., BAUD, M. (2015) Water reform governmentality in Ecuador: neoliberalism, centralization, and the restraining of polycentric authority and community rule making. *Geoforum* 64: 281-291.
- BRAUN B, WHATMORE, S (ed.) (2010). *Political Matter: Techoscience, Democracy and Public Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- BRENNER N, PECK, J., THEODORE, N (2010) After neoliberalization? *Globalizations* 7: 327-345.
- CARIA S, DOMÍNGUEZ, R (2016) Ecuador's Buen Vivir: A New Ideology for Development. *Latin American Perspectives* 43: 18-33.
- CONAIE (2007) *Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente Principios y Lineamientos para la nueva constitución del Ecuador. Por un estado plurinacional, unitario, soberano, incluyente, equitativo y laico*. Quito: Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador.

- DAVIDOV V (2013) Mining versus Oil Extraction: Divergent and Differentiated Environmental Subjectivities in 'Post-Neoliberal' Ecuador. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 18: 485-504.
- DAVIES G (2013) Mobilizing Experimental Life: Spaces of Becoming with Mutant Mice. *Theory, Culture and Society* 30: 129-153.
- DAWNEY L (2013) The interruption: investigating subjectivation and affect. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31: 628-644.
- DE FREITAS C, MARSTON, A., BAKKER, K (2015) Not-quite-neoliberal natures in Latin America: an introduction. *Geoforum* 64: 239-245.
- DE LA CADENA M (2010) Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond 'Politics'. *Cultural Anthropology* 25: 334-370.
- DELEUZE G (1988) *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* San Francisco, CA: City Light Books.
- DELEUZE G (1990) *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books.
- EAGLETON T (2015) *Hope without Optimism* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- ELWOOD S, BOND, P., MARTÍNEZ NOVO, C., RADCLIFFE, S (2016) Learning from postneoliberalisms. *Progress in Human Geography* Online First.
- ERREJÓN Í & GUIJARRO, J (2016) Post-Neoliberalism's Difficult Hegemonic Consolidation. *Latin American Perspectives* 43: 34-52.
- ESCOBAR A (2010) Latin America at the crossroads: alternative modernizations, post-neoliberalism, or post development? *Cultural Studies* 24: 1-65.
- FIALLOS C. 2014. *Sumak kawsay, la palabra usurpada* [Online]. Quito: Plan V. Available: <http://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/sumak-kawsay-la-palabra-usurpada/pagina/0/4> [Accessed 09 January 2015 2015].
- GADE D (1999) *Nature and culture in the Andes* Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- GAMSO J (2016) A Case of Diversified Dependency. *Latin American Perspectives* 43: 109-123.
- GERLACH J (2016) Middle Hope. *cultural geographies*: 1474474016680105.
- GERLACH J, JELLIS, T (2015) Guattari: Impractical Philosophy. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 5: 131-148.
- GONZALEZ-VICENTE R (2013) Development dynamics of Chinese resource-based investment in Peru and Ecuador. *Latin American Politics and Society* 55: 46-72.
- GRUGEL J, RIGGIROZZI, P (2012) Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: rebuilding and reclaiming the state after crisis. *Development and Change* 43: 1-21.
- GUATTARI F (2005) *The Three Ecologies* London: Bloomsbury.
- GUDYNAS E (2011) Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow. *Development* 54: 441-447.
- GUDYNAS E (2013) El malestar moderno con el buen vivir: reacciones y resistencias frente a una alternativa al desarrollo. *Ecuador Debate* 88: 183-205.
- HAMPSHIRE S (1951) *Spinoza* London: Pelican Books.
- HARVEY D (1991) *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- HARVEY D 2013. El neoliberalismo como 'proyecto de clase'. In: BOULET E (ed.). *Marxismo Crítico*.
- HERNÁNDEZ M (2009) Sumak kaway y sumak qamaña, el reto de aprender del sur. Reflexiones en torno al Buen Vivir. *Obets* 4: 55-65.
- HIDALGO F, MÁRQUEZ, F (ed.) (2012). *Contrahegemonía y buen vivir*, Quito: ECE/CINDES.
- HIDALGO-CAPITÁN A, GUILLÉN GARCIA, A., DELEG GUAZHA, N (ed.) (2014). *Sumak kawsay yuyay. Antología del Pensamiento Indigenista Ecuatoriano sobre sumak kawsay*, Huelva y Cuenca: Universidad de Cuenca.
- HUANACUNI MAMANI F (2010) *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien. Filosofía, políticas, estrategias y experiencias regionales andinas* La Paz: CAOI.
- HYNES M (2015) Indifferent by nature: a post-humanist reframing of the problem of indifference. *Environment and Planning A* Online First: 1-16.
- JACKSON M Forthcoming. Nature, critique, ontology, and some decolonial options: problematizing 'the political'. In: MARSDEN T (ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Nature*. London: Sage.

- LALANDER R (2014) Rights of Nature and the Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia and Ecuador: a Straitjacket for Progressive Development Politics? (Derechos de la naturaleza y los pueblos indígenas en Bolivia y Ecuador: una camisa de fuerza para las políticas progresistas de desarrollo? *Revista Iberoamericana de Estudios de Desarrollo* 3: 148-173.
- LARA LARA F, HERRÁN GASCÓN (2016) Reflexiones sobre la educación del sumak kawsay en Ecuador. *Araucaria. Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades* 18: 41-58.
- LATOUR B (1993) *We have never been modern* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- LE QUANG M (2016) The Yasuní-ITT Initiative: toward New Imaginaries. *Latin American Perspectives* 43: 187-199.
- LORIMER J (2012) Multinatural geographies for the Anthropocene. *Progress in Human Geography* 36: 593-612.
- LUDLOW F, BAKER, L., BROCK, S., HEBDON, C., DOVE, M (2016) The double binds of indigeneity and indigenous resistance. *Humanities* 5: 1-19.
- MCALLISTER B (2014) Adequate and Inadequate Ideas in Spinoza. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 31: 119-136.
- MCCORMACK D (2007) Molecular affects in human geographies. *Environment and Planning A* 39: 359-377.
- MERINO R (2016) An alternative to 'alternative development': Buen Vivir and human development in Andean countries. *Oxford Development Studies* 44: 271-286.
- MIGNOLO W (2009) Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and de-colonial freedom. *Theory, Culture and Society* 26.
- MONTAG W (1989) Spinoza: Politics in a World without Transcendence. *Rethinking Marxism* 2: 89-103.
- OVIEDO FREIRE A (2013) *Buen Vivir vs Sumak Kawsay: Reforma Capitalista y Revolución Alternativa* Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ciccus.
- PARR A (ed.) (2010). *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- PECK J (2004) Geography and public policy: constructions of neoliberalism. *Progress in Human Geography* 28: 392-405.
- PERREAULT T, VALDIVIA, G (2010) Hydrocarbons, popular protest, and national imaginaries: Ecuador and Bolivia in comparative context. *Geoforum* 41: 689-699.
- POWELL R, KLINKE, I., JAZEEL, T., DALEY, P., KAMATA, N., HEFFERNAN, M., SWAIN, A., MCCONNELL, F., BARRY, A., PHILLIPS, R (2017) Interventions in the political geographies of Area. *Political Geography* 57: 94-104.
- QUINTON A 1987. Bryan Magee speaks to Anthony Quinton about Spinoza and Leibniz. In: MAGEE B (ed.) *The Great Philosophers*. London: BBC.
- RADCLIFFE SA (2012) Development for a postneoliberal era? Sumak kawsay, living well and the limits to decolonisation in Ecuador. *Geoforum* 43: 240-249.
- RAMÍREZ GALLEGOS F (2016) Political Change, State Autonomy, and Post-Neoliberalism in Ecuador, 2007–2012. *Latin American Perspectives* 43: 143-157.
- RAMÍREZ R 2010. Socialismo y sumak kawsay. In: SENPLADES (ed.) *Los Nuevos Retos de América Latina: Socialismo y Sumak Kawsay*. Quito: Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo.
- REHMANN J (2016) What kind of 'life affirmation'? Disentangling the conflation of Spinoza and Nietzsche. *Rethinking Marxism* 28: 397-417.
- RUCKERT A, MACDONALD, L., PROULX, K (2016) Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: a conceptual review. *Third World Quarterly* Online First.
- RUDDICK S (2008) Towards a dialectics of the positive. *Environment and Planning A* 40: 2588-2602.
- RUDDICK S (2010) The Politics of Affect: Spinoza in the Work of Negri and Deleuze. *Theory, Culture and Society* 27: 21-45.
- RUDDICK S (2012) Power and the problem of composition. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2: 207-211.
- RUDDICK S (2016) Governed as it were by chance: monstrous infinitude and the problem of nature in the work of Spinoza. *Philosophy Today* Online First.

- SENPLADES (2013) *Plan Nacional Par el Buen Vivir: 2013-2017* Quito: Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo.
- SHADE L (2015) Sustainable development or sacrifice zone? Politics below the surface in post-neoliberal Ecuador. *The Extractive Industries and Society* In Press.
- SHARP H (2007) The Force of Ideas in Spinoza. *Political Theory* 35: 732-755.
- SHARP H (2011) *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- SILVA V (2016) The Return of the State, New Social Actors, and Post-Neoliberalism in Ecuador. *Latin American Perspectives* 43: 4-17.
- SIMBAÑA F (2011). El sumak kawsay como proyecto político. In: LANG M, MOKRANI, D (ed.) *Más allá del desarrollo*. Quito: Abya Yala.
- SPINOZA B (2002) *Spinoza: Complete Works* Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- SPIVAK G (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In: NELSON C, GROSSBERG, L (ed.) *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- SUNDBERG J (2003) Masculinist epistemologies and the politics of fieldwork in Latin Americanist Geography. *The Professional Geographer* 55: 180-190.
- SUNDBERG J (2014) Decolonizing posthumanist geographies. *Cultural Geographies* 21: 33-47.
- SWYNGEDOUW E (2011) Depoliticized environments: the end of nature, climate change and the post-political condition. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 69: 253-274.
- TAPIA TAPIA S (2016) Sumak kawsay, coloniality and the criminalisation of violence against women in Ecuador. *Feminist Theory* 17: 141-156.
- VALDIVIA G (2008) Governing relations between people and things: citizenship, territory, and the political economy of petroleum in Ecuador. *Political Geography* 27: 456-477.
- VANHULST J, BELING, A (2014) Buen vivir: emergent discourse within or beyond sustainable development? *Ecological Economics* 101: 54-63.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO E (2004) Pespectival anthropology and the method of controlled equivocation in Tipití. . *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 2: 3-22.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO E (2014) *Cannibal Metaphysics* Minneapolis, MN: Univocal.
- WALKER R (1985) Spinoza and the Coherence Theory of Truth. *Mind* 94: 1-18.
- WALSH C (2010) Development as Buen Vivir: institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements. *Development* 53: 15-21.
- WILSON J, BAYÓN, M (2015) Concrete jungle: the planetary urbanization of the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Human Geography* 8: 1-23.
- WILSON J, BAYÓN, M (2017) The nature of postneoliberalism: building bio-socialism in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Geoforum* 81: 55-65.
- WOODWARD K (2014) Affect, state theory, and the politics of confusion. *Political Geography* 41: 21-31.
- YATES J, BAKKER, K (2014) Debating the 'post-neoliberal turn' in Latin America. *Progress in Human Geography* 38: 62-90.
- ZIMMERER KS (2012) The indigenous concept of *kawsay*, the politics of knowledge and development, and the borderlands of environmental sustainability in Latin America. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 127: 600-606.
- ZIMMERER KS (2015) Environmental governance through 'speaking like an indigenous state' and respatializing resources: ethical livelihood concepts in Bolivia as versatility or verisimilitude? *Geoforum* 64: 314-324.

Notes

ⁱ Alianza PAIS – the socialist collective established in 2006 as Correa's electoral vehicle. PAIS, whilst meaning 'country' in English, is used also as an acronym for Patria Altiva I Soberana – Proud and Sovereign Fatherland.

ⁱⁱ Named after the town Montecristi, Manabí province where the Constitutional Assembly was convened in 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱ CONAIE – Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador was founded in 1986 to provide a protest and political platform for the country's disparate indigenous communities.

^{iv} Note the ill-tempered spat that broke out in late 2015 between Eduardo Gudynas and David Harvey (or rather advocates of Harvey). Gudynas intimates that Harvey, through his work in Ecuador, is participant to a 'friendly colonialism'. Harvey's Ecuadorian unit of advanced studies, CENEDT (Centro Nacional de Estrategia para el Derecho al Territorio) (<https://derechoterritorio.wordpress.com/>), retorted, accusing Gudynas of passive aggression. See: <http://lalineadefuego.info/2015/11/27/the-passive-agression-of-eduardo-gudynas-an-analysis-by-japhy-wilson-estefania-martinez-thomas-purcell-and-carla-simbana/>

^v For a useful primer on Spinoza's metaphysics, see Kober (2013).